COMMONWEAL

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Coping with chronic illness

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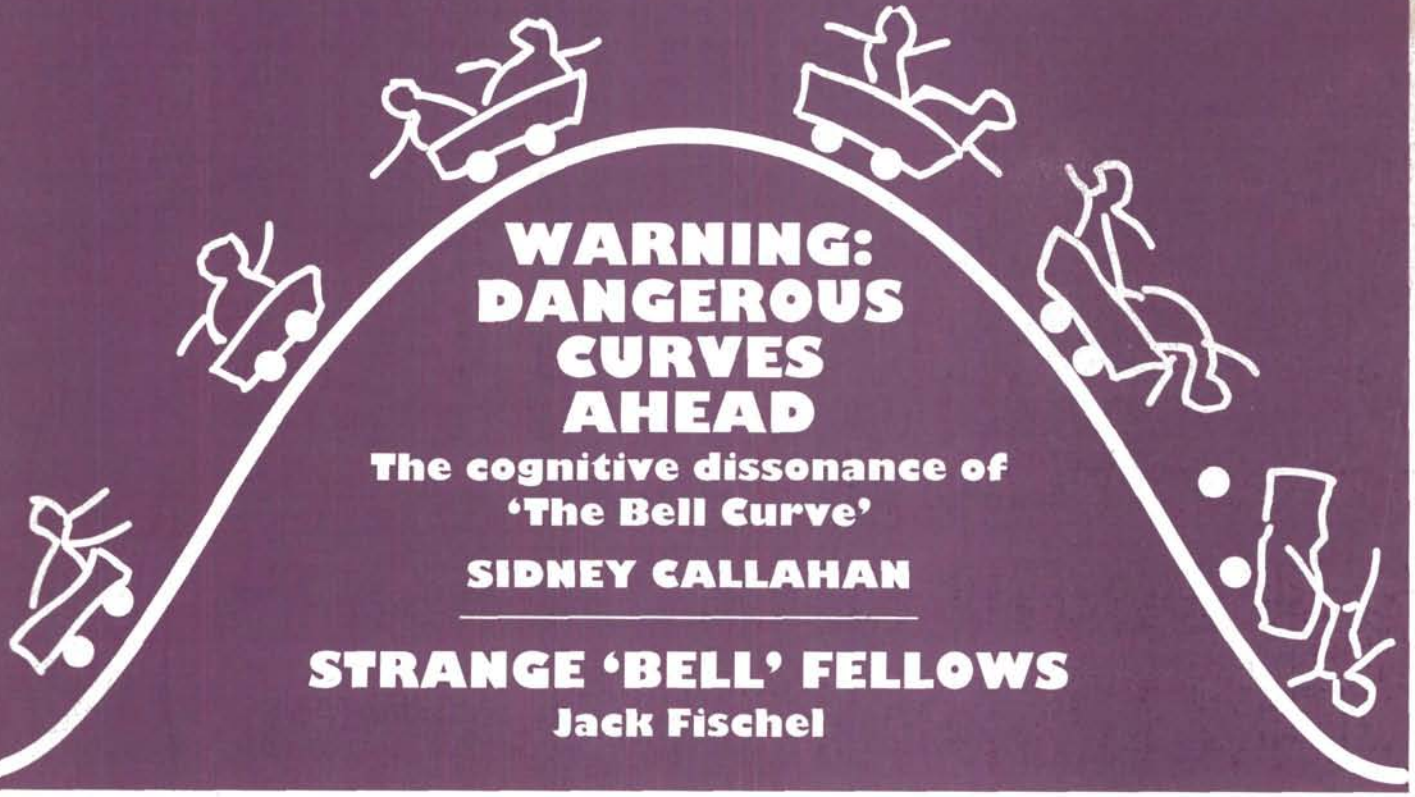

WARNING: DANGEROUS CURVES AHEAD

The cognitive dissonance of 'The Bell Curve'

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

STRANGE 'BELL' FELLOWS

Jack Fischel

BOOKS

DAVID McCABE on Jean Bethke Elshtain's 'Democracy on Trial'

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CORRESPONDENCE

Louder, please

Camarillo, Calif.

To the Editors: As the National Right to Life Committee speaks out to condemn the murders of doctors at abortion clinics, it uses so puny a voice that it amounts to praise by faint damnation. JIM HOOD, M.D.

Sheen didn't shine

Lupton, Mich.

To the Editors: In his brief review [December 2] of David Halberstam's *The Fifties*, Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland expresses surprise that the book doesn't mention Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. He might be just as surprised to find that Bishop Sheen was hardly ever mentioned in the *Commonweal* of the fifties, and then only in condescending ways. Though remembering those pulpy issues as dearer, the editors must have been a shade snooty then, too. HENRY J. ELDER

The editors: Back in the fifties, *Commonweal* editors couldn't afford TV sets.

Thanks, Frank

Nashville, Tenn.

To the Editors: Thanks to you and to Frank McConnell for brightening up this rather dull Monday evening—and for reminding me how much I do miss hearing Pete Townshend's masterful writings. "Who's on First" [January 13] was a real touch of spice; I couldn't agree more or say it better, though I would add that *Quadrophenia* ranks right alongside *Tommy* as a true work of genius. The two "operas" together convey a rock 'n' roll vision so far unequaled. Thanks again for a delightful few minutes of remembering and reflection. RICK CHAMPION

McConnell: Claptrap

Evanston, Ill.

To the Editors: Frank McConnell belongs to that sad group of people whose egos outstrip their accomplishments. To justify their

"I'm afraid that vow of silence you took includes the radio, Brother Francis."

opinion of themselves, they discover some "truth" that is hidden from us mere mortals. For some it is astrology, for others pyramid power, for Frank it's rock'n'roll. With apologies to Groucho Marx, I ask you, "Whom are you going to believe? Frank or your own ears?" Fifty years from now not even the Boston Pops will be playing this stuff. When you print claptrap you demean *Commonweal*'s tradition of excellence. JAMES L. HEITSCH

Callahan's victim God

Danvers, Mass.

To the Editors: Leafing through recent issues, I found an article that simply knocked me flat: Sidney Callahan's "Paradigms in Peril" [October 7, 1994]. Laboring under the illusion that I am an ordinary Catholic believer, I discovered that I am really a fundamentalist—one who believes, says Ms. Callahan, that "[e]ither the recalcitrant ones cannot reason properly or they refuse in their pride to submit to the authority of those commissioned by God to pass on divinely revealed truths." The author then comments: "Fundamentalism comes in many guises but we know it when we see it."

Anyone who believes in apostolic succession is a fundamentalist? Along with myself, it seems that every pope and saint since Saint Peter is a fundamentalist, although I always thought that fundamentalists believed in biblical inerrancy rather than apostolic succession. Even Saint Thomas, whom Callahan surprisingly calls on as a witness for the defense of process theology, is a victim of the dreaded syndrome.

Ms. Callahan is correct that the difference between the average, orthodox lay Catholic like me and liberal intellectuals like her is fundamental. Her God is overwhelmed by the web of historical contexts, dynamic changing systemic forces, and emotional patterns she posits to the point that he is unable to get his truth through to us. My God, and I daresay Saint Thomas's God, is the creator of any and all contexts and systemic forces, not their victim.

DAVID M. TYE

The author replies:

Good grief, here I thought I was displaying my "confidence in a critical moral realism," while striking a blow against moral relativism on behalf of reason and universal human nature. I certainly did not mean to question the existence or importance of the

(Continued on page 22)

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COMMONWEAL

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The American prospect

Speaking to a Congress controlled by an aggressive Republican party that believes it was issued a mandate in November to shrink government and dismantle the welfare state, President Bill Clinton dished up a State of the Union address that was long on humility (good), long on the need for comity and cooperation (better), long in its nod to nearly every constituency group (worse), and just plain *long* altogether (bad).

Running an hour and twenty minutes, Clinton's stemwinder was the longest State of the Union message on record. Clinton can give a good speech, and much of what he said last month, especially his defense of government action on behalf of the poor, needed saying. To a remarkable extent, Republican attacks on government and liberalism and the stunning November election have pushed the president to the margins of political debate. Clinton needed to defend government's legitimate role and recapture the public's attention, if not its respect. Whether he succeeded is unclear. Coming from a man whose perceived problem is that he talks too much and doesn't act decisively enough, Clinton's marathon oration seemed to exemplify the lack of discipline that has hamstrung his administration. In trying to do too much while trying to appease too many people, Clinton risked squandering what little political leverage he has left.

Reaction to the speech was revealingly mixed. Pundits generally faulted the president for sounding like a born-again Republican, for a lack of concrete proposals, and for missing the opportunity to clearly define his differences with the majority. Clinton endorsed an increase in the minimum wage, but he failed to stipulate the amount. He seemed to accept the popular idea of a balanced budget amendment... or did he? His call (a necessary one) for a strict accounting of where the enormous spending cuts needed to balance the budget would come from seemed to argue for the folly of such an amendment, but he did not say that explicitly. Over all, commentators tended to see the speech, and especially its conciliatory tone and conservative rhetoric, as another attempt by Clinton to defuse opposition with vagueness, to substitute endless talk of policy for any defense of principle.

However, initial public opinion surveys indicated the speech was well received by the citizenry. Skepticism about Clinton, even outright hostility toward him, remain widespread. But most Americans still want him to succeed and seemed pleased that he humbly accepted the implied rebuke of November's election. Perhaps more than anything else, many Americans are still eager for the end of gridlock in Washington, and do sincerely long for greater civility in politics. Clinton's call to "rise above [and] put aside partisanship, pettiness, and pride" was apparently welcomed. In once again embracing the demand for smaller, more efficient government—something he campaigned for in '92, but put aside in deference to the

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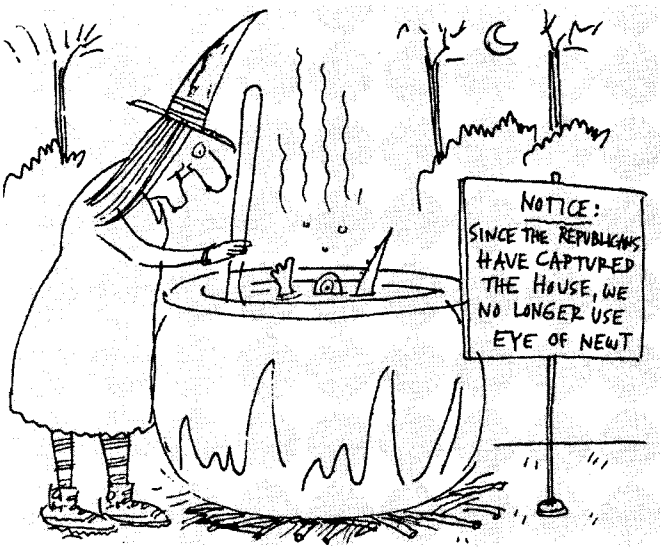
Democratic Congress—Clinton was seen as cynical or hypocritical by Republican opponents and many commentators. American voters, however, are notoriously unideological, and in all likelihood will judge Clinton and his Republican adversaries by whether they get anything constructive done. If the Republicans overreach and Clinton and the Democrats continue to flounder, even more change and fragmentation can be expected in '96.

The president's calls for campaign finance and lobbying reform, a hike in the minimum wage, support of Head Start, continuation of the nuclear test-ban treaty, and, most urgently, adequate help for the Mexican debt crisis, are worth supporting. The Republican effort to repeal the ban on assault weapons is worthy of his promised veto. Especially heartening was Clinton's eagerness to resist the effort to "punish poor children for the mistakes of their parents." Welfare reform, he rightly added, is absolutely necessary, and perhaps experimentation in the states is the best way to do it. "But also let this be the year that we stop using this issue to divide America." Amen to that.

Despite his own advocacy of a middle-class tax cut, Clinton cautioned against tax cuts that would increase the deficit. Much more of that kind of talk was and is needed. Neither Clinton nor the new Republican Congress will make much progress in "cut[ting] yesterday's government to solve tomorrow's problems" until they tackle spending growth in middle-class entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security. But neither the Republican "revolutionaries" nor this on-again, off-again "New Democrat" president show much stomach for such difficult choices. And neither, frankly, do the voters. The tough-minded recommendations by the Bipartisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform, which warned of the massive deficits ahead unless federal entitlement spending is controlled and more of the burden shifted to those who can afford it, have been ignored by both parties. And yet, without a dramatic change of course, in a mere six years the budget deficit will climb to $322 billion. The Republicans' so-called fiscally conservative "Contract with America" ignores this entirely, and where it does indulge in specifics (welfare, crime, and the balanced budget amendment) it is only too eager to punish the poor and make meretricious promises of tax cuts to the middle class and rich.

Meeting tomorrow's problems—getting a handle on the federal budget, reducing the national debt, and investing wisely to help the poor—will require means testing for Social Security and Medicare, higher taxes, and a secure safety net for those who cannot care for themselves. Revisiting the question of fairness and efficiency in health care will also be necessary. Seen in this light, few of the most troubling difficulties facing the nation were seriously engaged by the president's speech. Whether Clinton will be able to find the political will and the votes necessary to forestall the excesses of the Republicans and turn the nation's attention to preparing for a difficult future remains very much in doubt.



ET CETERA

IT'S DISCRIMINATORY According to the [London] *Tablet*, a new device for detecting when a woman is fertile is under trial by researchers in Britain, Ireland, and Germany, and Catholics interested in natural family planning are excited by the news. The device, which is said to be more than 90 percent accurate, "takes readings from urine samples and stores information on the patterns of hormone changes in the individual user." It shows a green light during the "safe" period, a red light when the woman is fertile. The report says nothing about users who are colorblind. Bells? Flags? Ask a neighbor?

REPORT FROM CHOP CHOP SQUARE

INVITATION TO A BEHEADING

FIGHTING CRIME IN SAUDI ARABIA

In the United States crime dominates news headlines and holds big-city Americans emotionally hostage. It threatens to socially gerrymander the citizenry into the "secures" and the "not secures."

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, crime is not a problem. Saudi Arabia's system of justice is born of Islamic doctrine and nurtured by a royal family that takes its paternal responsibilities seriously. Perhaps a little too seriously.

I had the opportunity to view Saudi justice in action. It happened on October 15, 1993, two years into my three-year tour as a marketing consultant in Riyadh. Three years that seemed like a lifetime.

11:00, Friday morning, October 15, 1993. Riyadh's citizens

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were relaxing; sleeping late, reading the paper, drinking tea, and watching TV. It was a typical Islamic Sabbath, not unlike a typical American Sunday morning. Riyadh is not a beautiful city, but when its 1 million aspiring NASCAR winners are off the roads and the religious police are resting between prayer calls (undoubtedly gearing up for another big weekend of expatriate bashing), it's a peaceful place.

By 11:30, however, downtown Riyadh had metamorphosed. An eclectic mixture of multiple nationalities, speaking a cacophony of unintelligible languages, were all zeroing in on the same destination: the parking lot of the city's grand mosque, the place Westerners called "Chop Chop Square." Their frenzied excitement reminded me of game day at the football field with the loyal fans scurrying from all 360 radii to see the kickoff. Except, instead of a kickoff, the Middle Eastern "fans" wanted to see a head chopped off.

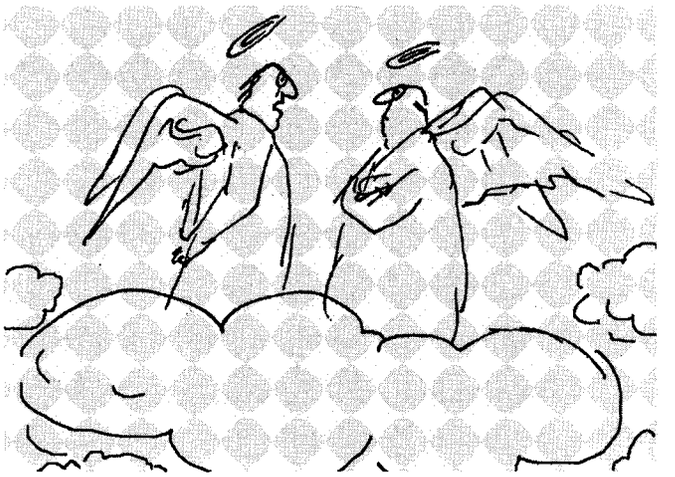
I had heard all the stories of beheadings and maimings. Among us Westerners, the Saudis' judicial system is famous. Called barbaric and effective in the same breath, it is condemned by Amnesty International yet praised by many who walk the safe Saudi streets. But until that Friday, I never knew how many of the stories were true and how many were the embellishment of an attention-getting headline. Now I know.

At 12:00 the chanting started, signaling the beginning of noon prayer. The Islamic faithful were already ten-deep surrounding the mosque parking lot that would serve as the site for the sacrament of decapitation. I was sandwiched in amongst thousands of third-country nationals—Pakistanis, Indians, Sudanese, and Bangladeshis—who were pushing forward to get the best view. I didn't want to believe that this was a religion of bloodthirsty curiosity seekers, so I assumed that most of the congregation was there out of an Islamic sense of responsibility. "For punishment to be an effective deterrent, it must be witnessed." However, the zeal with which the assembled citizenry relished that responsibility was frightening.

At 12:30 the chanting ceased. Prayer call was over. The faithful followers of "the one true religion" scrambled to recover their prayer rugs and race forward for the best viewing spot. Fortunately, the police had formed an inside perimeter to keep the truly pious, or overly curious, from getting too close to the ministrations.

Between spectators' heads I caught glimpses of the stage upon which was soon to be played out a one-act execution. On its far side sat the Saudi contingent. Dignified, white robed, headdressed gentlemen, these spectators were in sharp contrast to the raucous rabble on my side. The scene was a microcosm of the classic societal struggle between the powerful and the powerless. On one side, the Riyadh proletariat pleaded for justice at the feet of their Saudi masters; on the other, the royal family had "the power of the thumb" to save or extinguish lives. I had heard of a case when they pardoned a couple of Western evangelists one year at Christmas time, but that was unusual. On October 15, 1993, their collective thumbs were pointed down.

A convicted Pakistani heroin dealer was led to the center of the square by four Saudi soldiers. He was docile, stumbling



"Looking back now, I see that being alive was the most dangerous thing that ever happened to me."

around, unable to walk on his own. He acted as if he were sedated. I thought how ironic it would be if, in their desire to be humane, these people had drugged a man about to be executed for pushing drugs.

The condemned man knelt on the pavement while the guards helped him pull his shirt over his head and down to his shoulders. That maneuver was designed to add pressure to the back of the neck and expedite the head falling forward. It also must have been the signal for the headliner to make his appearance, for out sprang the executioner, proudly brandishing a gleaming scimitar that had probably been passed down to him from his father. He positioned himself upstage, allowing the victim to face Mecca, but still affording the audience an unobstructed view. He grasped his sword with both hands, coiled his body, and lashed out at the back of the man's neck. The prisoner's body fell forward on top of his head.

It was over. There were no benedictory remarks, no lamenting mourners. A black van drove to the site and the clean-up crew debarked. Three workers shoveled the crumpled mass of humanity into the van while two others hosed the blood off the asphalt so the parking lot would be clean for evening prayer.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia may be uniquely suited to beheading as a means of maintaining law and order. Their autocratic monarchy is designed to rule by edict. If the king says "off with your head," the condemned man kneels down and leans forward.

But dictatorships are common in so many third-world countries. Slaves to a Pol Pot, an Idi Amin, a Khadaffi, or an Ayatollah, the people don't have any say in the law and order process. So why is the Kingdom different?

Because the leaders' actions are legitimized by a higher power. As the custodian of two of Islam's holy shrines and leader of the faith in the Middle East, the King of Saudi Arabia's religious authority is total. His actions are justified by Allah. And the people don't argue with Allah. At least they don't argue with Allah in Saudi Arabia. BILL YOUKEY

Bill Youkey, a free-lance writer, lives in Owens Cross Roads, Alabama.

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GROWING UP IN AMERICA

CHILDREN AS TARGETS OF VIOLENCE

In A. S. Byatt's essay on the British poet, D. J. Enright ("A Sense of Religion: Enright's God," *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*, Turtle Bay Books, 1991), Byatt quotes from a poem in which Enright looks at a picture by the Japanese artist, Hokusai:

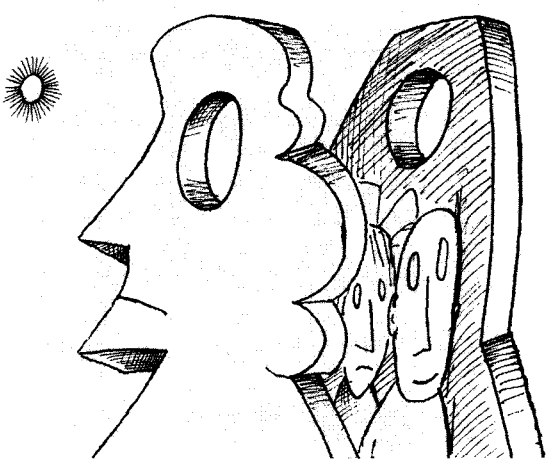
A child's head
Immobile, authentic, torn and bloody—
The point of repose in the picture, the point of movement in us.

"Which says much," continues Byatt, "about the relation of art to life, and of what it is to be 'moved,' of evil....It is as though Enright's interest in, if not need for, religion arises from the certain existence of the principle of evil, which entails the desire, if never the certainty, for the existence of theological good."

When I first read Byatt's essay last winter, I found myself recalling another winter evening, ten years ago. It was a cold December night, and very late. I had finished working; unable to sleep, I stepped outside and gazed at the stars, vibrant in the dark sky. From my balcony, I could see the glow of the night light in the adjoining room, where my small son was asleep.

This was during a period when the nightly news was filled with horror stories from Beirut, with video footage of small children who were maimed, screaming, dead. I stood on the balcony for a long time, looking at the distant stars with a mixture of wonder, apprehension, and outrage: that I and my son were safe that night and yet, under the same stars, in the same moment, there was unspeakable horror and suffering. Only by the sheer accident of birth, circumstance, and geography was my son asleep, safe, far from war.

The point of repose in the picture. I often wish I could take more comfort in that sense of safety, in the buffer zone that those of us in relatively privileged circumstances are able to construct around our children. But because this safety is accidental, I know it is illusory. My children's relative security only deepens my horror at the violence done to other children.



Historically, the violation of children has been confined to situations where the usual boundaries of morality break down: in war, for example, or in the extremities of dire poverty or mental illness. In a normal society, most children are safe; in a normal society, parents can raise their children to face the odds, to be resilient, to enter the adult world with a basic sense of trust.

My children were born in Germany. Attacks on children are still rare enough in Germany that I could be reasonably sure, when they left the house, that they were physically safe. It was more crucial to their development that they be given an increasing amount of independence than that I protect their every step.

They were ten and five when we moved to the United States. There were several points of culture shock when I returned to this country after thirteen years abroad, but none as disturbing as the realization of the violence regularly done in this society to children. During our last year in Germany, our son had started venturing downtown on the streetcar with his friends; our daughter had begun exploring the neighborhood on her bicycle.

It was a shock to all of us, when we arrived in this country, to realize that the children could not have the freedom here that they had in Germany. We live in a suburb of Washington, D.C., an area with good schools and quiet streets.

The month we moved in, a fourteen-year-old in another pleasant suburb was killed, while doing yard work, by a disturbed homeless man wandering around with a gun.

It quickly became clear to us that, despite the idyllic setting, the territory the children could safely explore on their own was far smaller than what they had become used to. It also became clear that, wherever they went, I would worry more about them—and this in itself introduced a new dynamic into our relationship.

In particular, my son was unhappy with this change. Most arguments centered on his desire to bicycle alone to the nearest "downtown," a shopping mall several miles away. The mall is not in a high-crime area; but in separate incidents last year, a fifteen-year-old girl was raped and a twelve-year-old boy robbed at gunpoint in the surrounding neighborhood.

Our ongoing argument was about when my son would be "old" enough. Finally, the discrepancy between the way things are and the way things should be hit me. "You're already old enough," I told him. "If this society were different, there would be no reason why you couldn't go on your own. But it's not safe." End of discussion.

I had the feeling that it was the end of more than that. His perception of the world as an exciting place in which to venture forth had changed. "America," he told a German friend, "is like a prison." But things are changing in Europe, too; in general, the whole world is becoming a dangerous place for children. Who among us, including children, can fail to be aware of the regularity with which children are beaten, abused, raped, and killed?

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For a long time, I tried to explain this phenomenon to my children using psychological or sociological answers. (Obviously, anyone who harms a child has problems of some nature.) But I find that the usual explanations aren't sufficient anymore. In particular, the case of Susan Smith stumped me. In discussing it with my children last fall, I found myself talking not about the reason for Smith's murder of her two young sons—what possible reason could make this tragedy understandable?—but about the significance of religious faith.

I am convinced that I have to offer my children possibilities for living, not just warnings and horror stories. If children are to find joy in their lives and contribute something to the world, they cannot be afraid all the time. They will have to retain the capacity to discover and implement the good in a world that offers daily examples of the complete irrelevance of "the theological good."

Like Enright looking at Hokusai's picture of a dead child, I confront my religious belief and its apparent impotence in the face of evil. We are certain of evil, writes Byatt; we desire the good. I fear that this certainty, not our desire for the good, is the spark of movement within us. It impels us in directions that are healthy neither for us nor for our children. A society in which so many children become victims inevitably begins to see its children in a different way: not as beings created in the image of God, destined and intended for love, responsibility, and independence, but as likely victims, as possible targets of violence, as potential objects of sexual desire. Even in our efforts to protect our children, we give them the message that there is something natural about this state of affairs, that this is the way the world is, that we can only hide from evil, not stop it.

What will happen to a generation of children raised to see the world as the province of certain, random evil? Even those fortunate ones whose immediate world is intact and loving live in a society where newborn babies are found in garbage cans, children kill other children, parents kill children, and where inner-city children fantasize about their funerals.

Sometimes, when my children and I talk about how to resolve conflicts in school, deal with strangers, or respond in uncertain situations, I feel that I am trying to instill in them a totally impractical mission. I want them to be safe. But I also want them to be certain of the power of good and of decency. I want this certainty—not fear, distrust, and a blind desire for survival—to be the point of movement in their lives.

I don't know if this will work. With good reason, my children are far more certain of evil at this point than of the existence of good. That is part of the horror in the Susan Smith story. But the real horror is that it is only an extreme example of what has become a commonplace event: the murder of children. A certain kind of innocence is necessary for the survival of the desire for the good. When that innocence dies in our children, something is destroyed in all of us as well.

VICTORIA J. BARNETT

Victoria J. Barnett, a writer and scholar, is the author of For the Soul of the People *(Oxford University Press, 1992).*

OF SEVERAL MINDS John Garvey

COMMERCIALS

THE ETHER OF THE AGE

I have written that television and law are all that we have in common in America, but I am beginning to think that this is too rich an assessment. It's all television. And it has more than an influence on us: We can be influenced by the way the weather makes us feel, or by a recent good essay or novel we've read; but television in fact creates the world within which we feel, and instructs us how we should feel. It creates the world within which we are influenced. Even if, like me, you spend relatively little time watching television, the world in which (to quote Saint Paul) you live and move and have your being has been made for you by people whose world is derived from television; which is to say, your world is derived from advertising, a world in which you are the one to whom things are sold.

You can flee this world by becoming a hermit and moving to Antarctica, or you can simply accept it as unalterable, or you can try to change it (fat chance). The only realistic way to begin to deal with it, I think, is to see what advertisers are trying to do to you, to see the world they want you to believe in. This demands a distance and objectivity that may be hard to come by; but both are essential for any clarity, not only about television itself but about the world it has given us.

I recently read a book which is a near-perfect tool for achieving this distance. Leslie Savan is the advertising columnist for the *Village Voice*. In *The Sponsored Life* (Temple University Press), she gathers a number of columns and articles she has written over the last several years. She deals not only with ads on television but also with print ads. Television, however, is the most powerful advertising force, and the time on television which is not devoted to advertising is formed by it; and this in turn forms the rest of our world.

"To lead the sponsored life you don't really have to do anything," Savan writes. "You don't need to have a corporate sponsor as the museums or the movies do. You don't even have to buy anything—though it helps, and you will. You just have to live in America and share with the nation, or at least with your mail-intercept cohorts, certain paid-for expectations and values, rhythms, and reflexes." She points out that there is little serious criticism of advertising itself, only questions like "does this ad work?" The reasons are obvious. As Savan writes:

> Conveyors of commercial culture are free to question nearly all of modern life except their own life-sup-

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port system....When the Center for the Study of Commercialism, a well-respected, Washington D.C.-based nonprofit group, called a press conference in 1992 to announce the results of a study that showed the press repeatedly censoring itself under direct or anticipated advertising pressure, not a single TV or radio reporter attended, and only a few papers even mentioned it.

Savan offers a series of "tactics" on how to keep your distance and how to be clear about what these people are trying to do to you. I won't list them all here, but among them she recommends keeping in mind the fact that "we don't buy products, we buy the world that presents them." There is a world presented by BMW ads: If you can't afford to buy the car, you can at least buy a Ralph Lauren shirt or a Dove bar. Another tip: follow the flattery. "You'll find the ad's target market by asking who in any thirty-second drama is being praised for qualities they probably don't possess. When a black teen-ager plays basketball with a white baby boomer for Canada Dry,

"Gee—you look just like you do on television."

it's not black youth that's being pandered to. It's white boomers—the flattery being that they're cool enough to be accepted by blacks." She also points out that those ads that flatter us by being ironic, making us feel superior to all this hype, allow us to feel that we are controlling TV and its effect on us. "The cool commercials—I'm thinking of Nike spots, some Reeboks, most 501s, certainly all MTV promos—flatter us by saying we're too cool to fall for commercial values, and therefore cool enough to want their product."

You won't watch television in quite the same way after reading this book, which is what makes it so pleasantly subversive. Why is this important? Savan points out at the beginning of her introduction that if you count all logos, labels, and announcements, the average individual encounters about 16,000 ads every day. These aren't all encountered with full awareness and attention, of course, but they do form the texture of much of our life; and television's cultural influence is much more powerful for most of us than the cultural influence of ethnicity, religion, or family. This can be superficially irritating—for example, a lot of adolescent girls now speak in an accent that has nothing to do with region but is the result of a TV-borne virus—but its deeper reaches are pernicious: we are made restless and unhappy because of what we think we need, and the desire that is created for us by the advertising culture is bottomless.

When you think of the fact that most art for most of history served religious purposes and had a public function, which was to form the perception and understanding of the viewers, you realize that we are, in a way, wired to respond to images by being formed by them. But for most of history these images were sparsely placed: icons or statues or murals in a church or on the walls of a public building; the word, read out loud. Now every home is at the bottom of a funnel into which images are poured. Savan writes:

> The one question I am most often asked is, "Does advertising shape who we are and what we want, or does it merely reflect back to us our own emotions and desires?" As with most nature or nurture questions, the answer is both. The real ad in any campaign is controlled neither by admakers nor adwatchers; it exists somewhere between the TV set and the viewer, like a huge hairball, collecting bits of material and meaning from both. The real ad isn't even activated until viewers hand it their frustrations from work, the mood of their love life, their idiosyncratic misinterpretations, and most of all, I think, their everyday politics. On which class rung do they see themselves teetering? Do they ever so subtly flinch when a different race comes on TV? In this way we all coproduce the ads we see. Agency people are often aghast that anyone would find offensive meanings in their ads because "that's not what we intended." Intention has little to do with it. Whatever they meant, once an ad hits the air it becomes public property. That, I think, is where criticism should aim—at the fluctuating, multimeaning thing that floats over the country, reflecting us as we reflect it.

When we see examples of Nazi art, celebrating blonde heroics and Wagnerian values, or when we look at Soviet socialist realism, we see how obvious and how perverse the attempt to form people through the use of images can be. But what forms us is, for most of us, invisible as the air, because it surrounds us so completely. Savan's book, with its frequently funny and often brilliant analyses of particular ad campaigns and general trends, helps to see what surrounds and forms us. □

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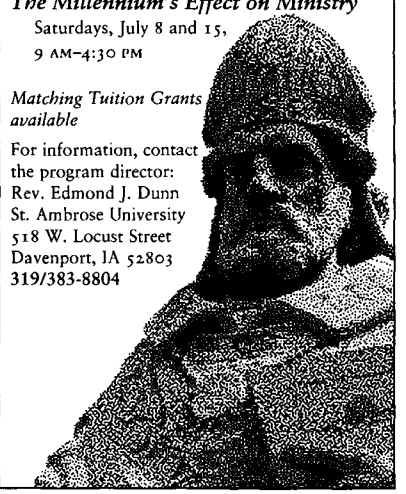

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THORNS INTO FEATHERS

COPING WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS

FLOYD SKLOOT

As thou hast made these feathers thorns, in the sharpness of this sickness, so, Lord, make these thorns feathers again.

John Donne, *Devotions III*

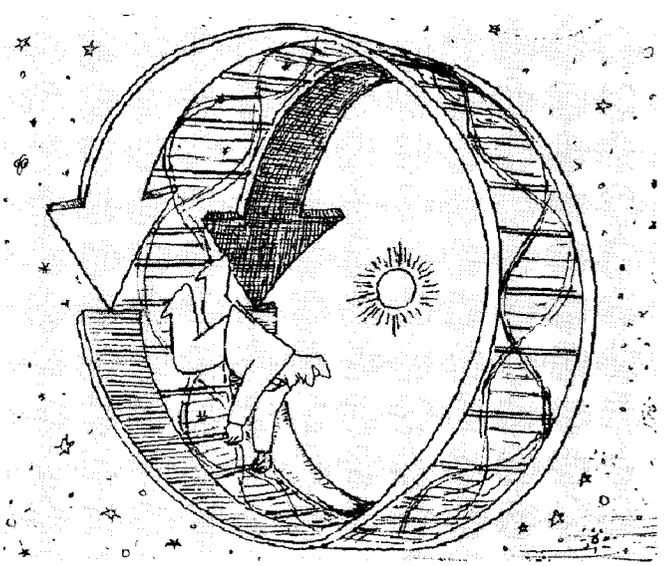
In the winter of 1623, the great English poet and preacher John Donne was stricken with epidemic typhus. "Variable, and therefore miserable condition of man!" he wrote. "This minute I was well, and am ill, this minute." Typhus, a louse-borne bacterial disease, killed hundreds of thousands throughout Jacobean England. Donne, at age fifty-two, suddenly found himself feverish, tormented by headaches, covered with spots. He took to his bed, where he felt "my slack sinews are iron fetters, and those thin sheets iron doors upon me." Not only were those sheets transformed into iron doors, but the feathers of his bed had become thorns. The situation was alarming enough that King James's own physician was dispatched to Donne's bedside.

The course of Donne's illness was summarized in 1640 by his biographer, Sir Izaak Walton: "God preserved his spirit, and kept his intellectuals as clear and perfect as when that sickness first seized his body; but it continued long, and threatened him with death, which he dreaded not." One enduring outcome of Donne's typhus episode was the writing of a brilliant book, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, a seventeenth-century best seller in which he mused passionately on the condition of his stricken body and soul. In what is perhaps the mother of all blurbs, Izaak Walton said the *Devotions* was "a book that may not unfitly be called a Sacred Picture of Spiritual Ecstasies."

Thinking about coping with my own long-term illness, I find myself drawn in particular to Donne's third devotion. Lying in his feather bed, which fever and pain transform into a bed of thorns, he asks God to reverse the alchemy and turn his bed back to feathers. In my own illness, I am sorry to say, God has not seen fit to keep my intellectuals as clear and perfect as when sickness first seized me—my brain has been scarred by lesions and I have lost approximately thirty IQ points. But, while I have not turned the thorns of my illness to feathers, I have nonetheless found ways to soften their spikes.

If you knew me five years ago, before I got sick, you would not know me now. Some of it is style, of course, or style reflecting substance. Cannot run anymore, so I have hand-carved hazelwood and cocobolo canes in place of running gear. Cannot work, so there is a wardrobe of baggy sweats or wildly patterned, floppy pants instead of the trim three-piece suits and shirts with snug collars. Look down and there are clogs instead of wing-tips, since for years it was a challenge just to tie my shoelaces. I wear a small hematite ball in my left earlobe now and use fingers instead of a brush to manage my hair, which—like my beard—is shot with gray. Though it is no heavier, the lean and hard body that I worked so diligently to sculpt is much softer now. As my wife Beverly says, it seems like my armor is gone.

But it is more than style. A lifelong city boy, I now live in the country and love it, despite the spiders and carpenter ants, despite skunks and the occasional porcupine, despite poison oak or a well that threatens to go dry and its iron-rich water that stains me amber. And I am slow now. I used to move through



FLOYD SKLOOT, *an author and poet, lives in Amity, Oregon. His recent work has appeared in the* American Scholar, Harvard Review, *and* The Best American Essays of 1993.

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my world like a halfback, zigging and zagging, always trying for that extra yard, very difficult to bring down. Now I conserve, I loiter, I move as in a dream; because if I don't, I will either fall or smack into something. But of this necessity has come a whole new way of being in my life. This goes for talking too, which I do at a more leisurely pace, interspersed now with actual listening. Something different and vital has emerged. My secret is that I have found the places within me that illness could not touch. I have learned to honor them.

Take music. Before I got sick, music to me was late fifties and early sixties rock 'n' roll. Give me doo-wop and Top 40 AM, Elvis and the Everly Brothers and Fats Domino. Music was for singing along with the phonograph, or with headphones when I jogged through downtown Portland. As background to dinner, or when company arrived, there was light jazz to show my extreme sophistication.

Obviously, this music was not for listening to all day while lying in bed or on a recliner month after month. This was not the proper stuff for a brain riddled with anatomic holes, for a mind so easily confused by stimuli that I could not sit in a restaurant unless I faced the wall, for a body that needed to rest and heal. In my illness, I did not need the Wall of Sound.

One day my best friend and running partner, Eric Hosticka, showed up with some Mozart. He brought Schumann and Schubert, a Beethoven piano sonata, Bach. Who?

"Nothing heavy," he said. "No symphonies or anything complicated."

I did not know what he was talking about. Classical music was by definition complicated and heavy, I thought, which was why it was discussed in hushed tones and pompous accents. It was written by people without first names, most of whom were cranky and tubercular and had wild hair. Not that I was a philistine; after all, I had read all of Thomas Hardy, even *The Hand of Ethelberta*. But classical music had remained outside my experience.

Eric sat with me and we listened to the music, mostly solo piano, or piano with violin, and one or two chamber pieces. As he said, nothing complicated. He pointed out a few things, but mostly just sat there across the room from me with his eyes closed and listened. A few days later, he brought something he said was a little more complex; if I did not like it, I could just go back to flute and harp. When I heard the first melancholy notes of the cello in Schumann's A-minor Concerto, my world changed. I did not know much about classical music, but I knew the music of illness when I heard it.

I averaged four-hours-a-day supine and surrounded by classical music during the first two years of my illness. It was not all sweetness and light: sometimes music took me to the very center of my experience, to the conflicts I was feeling about all that had changed in my life, to the vortex of emotions. But sometimes it took me outside myself altogether, into a realm of pure sound where there could be peace. Once, Eric called to say he would take me to buy a book on music appreciation. By the time he arrived at my door, half an hour later, I had not only forgotten he was coming, I did not even recognize him. He nodded and we sat down to listen to Chopin, who was a lot sicker than me for much of his life, before we headed to the store.

Without music, I would still have survived. But music helped me understand that my body's score had been completely revised. The symphony now included an extended movement of deep discord, a dark and confusing interlude that would, however, end up in a place worth knowing, provided that I listened well.

This was a deep, intuitive way to understand what my illness—Chronic Fatigue Syndrome—does to the body, throwing its intricately balanced, complex systems into disarray so that nothing works as expected any more, a cacophony of symptoms. Calling it Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is like calling Beethoven's Ninth Symphony a little music recital. It is like calling polio Chronic Stiffness Syndrome. A viral infection I had in December 1988 started it all. The infection, which probably targeted my brain, triggered an immune system cascade that my brain has never been able to turn off. Blood flow to the brain stem is reduced. Balance, memory, abstract reasoning, concentration, coordination, and stamina are damaged. I look away from people when I talk to them because their physical responses make me forget what I am saying. I often cannot find words that are in my vocabulary, so there are either long pauses while I search for them or I become a chorus of malapropisms, given to such pronouncements as "the charms are burning" instead of "the leaves are turning," or to saying over the dinner table, for reasons I still cannot figure out, "cross the bristle."

This is not the way I used to be. But music has taught me

Nancy G. Westerfield

Goes with the Territory

Comes with the territory: your ten fingers,
Ten toes, nine orifices, the whole rattan
Of your bones, that wickerwork slat-woven
To sit, stand, handle other erector-set
Toys like yourself; and then your territorial
Claims: poaching to enlarge on what you already
Own, your invasions, encroachments, retreats.
Call it your territory, narrowly or grandly
Defined, until sharply the clinical cartographer
Who maps your losses in territorial wars,
Reminds you that death has been X-rayed
Entering borders you held unapproachable,
Reminds you that what comes with the territory
Eventually, through truce and surrender, goes.

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my being could still contain harmony, if I could only hear the whole thing through.

Or take time. I have come to see that it is entirely possible to do just that, to *take* time, to seize control of it rather than be controlled by it. Paradoxically, the way to take control of time is to let it go altogether.

Time changes when a person is chronically ill. Often alone, I experienced the timelessness of solitude, the way everything slows down long enough to speed up while a person is immersed in illness. Though John Donne says, in his fifth devotion, that "as sickness is the greatest misery, so the greatest misery of sickness is solitude," I did not find this to be true for me. Solitude became a kind of chamber in which my separation from time and the world of measured change made sense. Because I was removed from the world of work—meetings, lunches, schedules, deadlines—and outside the rhythm of a traditional day—I found that a week's very shape was lost. Days dragged by. Unless people were coming over to visit or I had a doctor's appointment, it hardly mattered what time it was.

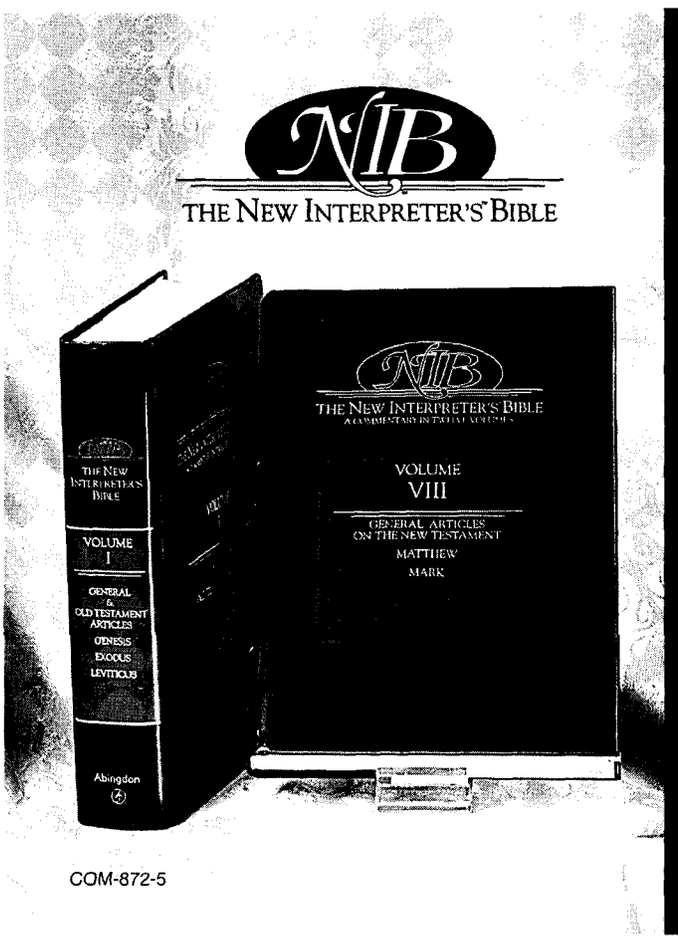
Soon I learned to eat when I was hungry and sleep when I was tired. I found that I did not have to eat three meals a day, or eat at fixed times; I could graze all day long if I wanted to. I found myself approaching sleep the same way. I napped a couple of hours in the morning and again in the afternoon because that was when I was too tired to be awake.

Finally, I weaned myself from the constant measuring of slow change that accompanies chronic illness. I gave up the thrice-daily graphing of body temperature (mine was sub-normal) and the compilation of sleep totals. I stopped weighing myself every morning. Oddly enough, all these changes did was provide a sense of greater control. "What poor elements are our happinesses made of," Donne writes in his fourteenth devotion, "if time, time which we can scarce consider to be any thing, be an essential part of our happiness!" The man certainly had a point.

None of this should have been surprising to me. Before getting sick, I would have said that as a competitive runner I knew my body and its needs. That was why I was running, to help body and soul deal with working full-time, being a parent to my children and the family's chief cook, and writing for a couple of hours every night. Time was a matter of being where I had to be when I had to be there; it was a matter of pace and records to beat. Good runners, the books and magazines said, listened to their bodies; I was one of those listeners.

Baloney. After getting sick, I saw that I might have listened to my body before, but did not really hear it.

So time, and the way my body functioned in time, turned out to be something I did not understand until getting sick. Time turns out to be a truly inner phenomenon. Despite clocks, agendas, and appointments, regardless of records, goals, and setting aside calendars, time measured how I experienced my self moving through my life. My illness had not stolen time from me after all; it had instead placed time in my own hands.



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Then there is love. I am talking about passionate, intense love, the kind of connection that seems impossible when someone is seriously and chronically ill. The kind that comes from so deep inside, the place seems to have been closed off by illness. Or worse, poisoned by it.

People who are sick frequently despair of loving like this. It seems so difficult to sustain if they are married and ill; finding it is beyond imagining if they are single and ill. If fortunate, they might have something else in their lives, a supportive, nurturing love, familiar and comfortable, that becomes romance's version of the sick-bed: a place to rest, to convalesce, to take care.

Ill and weakened, I was no longer the person who knew himself capable of passion's true eloquence. I felt as removed from it as from the rest of my old life's defining activities. It was astounding to feel passion touch the arid places within me and saturate them, reaching me where I had given up hope of ever being reached again. Then astonishment was replaced by the understanding that I must act on what I felt, that I could and must respond to the erotic feelings I was capable of having. Not that I could suddenly run a marathon again, or spell and do math reliably; not that I could remember birthdates, or walk without a cane, or get through a day without at least one long nap. Of course I could not miraculously function as though my central nervous system and immune system were normal again. But I found that Eros can be a healing power, assertive of life's wonder and surviving force.

So is touch. For years before we married, Beverly was my massage therapist, bringing me the healing power of touch. We were never intimate in the sense of being lovers then; Beverly would never compromise her professional ethics. But we became close friends through those years—me lying there with my eyes closed, the sheets smelling of sweet almond oil, Beverly moving around me for an hour with her powerful hands, her resonant voice becoming familiar as a recurring dream while we spoke softly to one another about our lives. In my illness there have been times when my joints and bones were so tender that her touch nearly jolted me from the table, but we found a way to manage that pain and bring ease to my body. I think we built a connection based on shared openness, on the sonorousness of intimate conversation.

"The disease hath established a kingdom," Donne writes in his tenth devotion, "an empire in me." It often seems to those who live there that passion has been banished from the land. Curiously, I found it locked in the Emperor's own dungeon and together with Beverly set it free.

For all they take away, chronic pain and illness also bring opportunity. The great challenge is to cope, but coping may not mean what people initially think it means.

The word "cope" comes from the Latin for "strike" or "blow." It implies activity, not passivity, engagement rather than withdrawal. I think it is among our signal responsibilities to accept the opportunities illness brings us and do something with them. That is how we cope, fighting back at the diseases which challenge us.

In his seventeenth devotion, Donne says "affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it." I cannot say that I agree with him there, but I am with him when he goes on to say "No man hath affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by it."

Now I live in a round house Beverly built in the middle of twenty hilly acres above a small town called Amity in the Willamette Valley. How appropriate that the word *amity* means "peaceful relations," since this is the place where I have found the peace that is part of converting the thorns of illness into feathers. From the room where I write for the one or two hours a day that I *can* write, I see the pond that Beverly dug amidst Douglas fir, maple, wild cherry, and scrub oak. One of the cats—plump, queenly Zola, who looks far too equable to be the fierce hunter—has just sashayed past the window, a mouse dangling from her mouth. Two Adirondack chairs scream "Spring will come! Spring will come!" while rakishly tilting back toward a winter sun that has not yet burned through the fog. Beverly bought and painted them magenta over two years ago, on that first weekend she brought me out here from Portland.

I am not saying that listening to music, modifying eating and sleeping habits, loving, and moving to the country will give control of a life taken over by illness and pain. For each person, surely, the details will vary, the untouched places will be different. But finding the places within that illness cannot reach, and learning to honor them, can help transform the bed of thorns that is illness. □

SCREEN

OUR GANG

ARMSTRONG'S 'LITTLE WOMEN'

In Gillian Armstrong's new version of it, *Little Women* has become *Spunky Women*. Of course, there was no shortage of spunk in the classic 1933 George Cukor production starring Katherine Hepburn, but the high spirits of the March family were also enacted with an unabashed emotionalism that was utterly true both to Louisa May Alcott and the Victorian era. During Cukor's version of the wedding of Meg March and John Brooke, the bride gently checks her groom's first postnuptial embrace; murmurs, "The first kiss is for Marmee"; and swoops into her mother's arms! Utterly authentic within the context and the period ambiance, but could a modern audience digest it? Gillian Armstrong and her scriptwriter, Robin Swicord, don't test our tolerance. There is plenty of emotion in this movie, but it has been carefully fashioned to avoid the least hint of gush.

The tone of any version of *Little Women* is set by the actress who plays Jo, the tomboy who grows up to be a successful writer, to be, indeed, Louisa May Alcott. (This new version stresses the autobiographical element.) In 1933, Jo

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was played by the glorious, the monstrous, the superhuman Hepburn, and though Cukor was too fine a director to let his film become a star vehicle, Hepburn infused every shot she was in with her specialty: New England briskness rendered radiant. No one who has seen it can forget the way Hepburn looks when she removes bonnet to reveal to her sisters her drastically cropped hair. (The tresses have been sold to provide for an emergency.) That mixture of flutter, defiance, and sneaky delight in the knowledge that her already odd appearance has now been made odder, was the essence of Hepburn's Jo and a permanent fact of Hepburn's screen personality. (Her later, equally great performance of the vacationing schoolteacher in *Summertime* was Jo autumnized.) She was the motor of Cukor's fluent and high-pitched movie just as, in Marvyn Le Roy's 1949 adaptation, June Allyson's Jo was the ingredient that made an already saccharine production truly sickening.

But here, Winona Ryder, a talented actress-in-the-making rather than a full-fledged star, brings romping energy and a certain gracious assertiveness to her role. She is engaging rather than magnetic and therefore both helpful and hurtful to the production. In the first two-thirds, with the action mainly in the March household, Ryder nicely interacts with the other actresses and rarely takes, or is given, center stage. But later, when Jo is on her own in New York City, Ryder fails to reward the focus now brought to bear on her character, and this permits a certain listlessness to creep into the film.

And there's another letdown in the New York episodes: Christian Bales, quite interesting as Laurie, the boy next door, is supplanted as romantic interest by the Professor Bhaer of Gabriel Byrne, who oozes so much quiet, self-effacing charm and nonthreatening masculinity that he comes perilously close to simpering. Bhaer is intended by Alcott to be to Jo exactly what Laurie wasn't: a soulmate who can elicit what is best in her without seeking to dominate. The character's name is a pun: Bhaer is a *bear* whose embrace supports rather than crushes. Byrne's twinkling can't convey this and certainly doesn't approach the achievement of Paul Lukas who, in his lumbering old-professor solidity, was the quintessence of the "good German."

So it is the Concord section of this movie—when the "little women" are still little—that really works. Susan Sarandon, as the mother, has unwisely neglected to rid herself of her redneck twang but is otherwise just right: firm without being bossy, idealistic but not priggish. Meg and Amy are adequately played, the latter by two actresses since Amy begins her screen life as a little girl and then grows into the nearest thing to a sexpot that a Concord maiden can be. For the role of Beth, the sickly sister wafted to heaven by seraphim, the director took a real chance that narrowly paid off by casting Claire Danes (star of TV's "My So-Called Life"). Danes doesn't look frail; her face is plain, its features rather flat, in some shots almost brutal. But the actress's knack for conveying a sort of frozen bewilderment at the carnage life makes of the infirm (and of us all, eventually) works well in portraying Beth's invalid fortitude and her doomed sweetness without a touch of schmaltz.

Gillian Armstrong was fated to direct this movie. Her wonderful feature debut, *My Brilliant Career*, was a sort of *Little Women* of the outback, and its concluding scene, Judy Davis's rejection of Sam Neil's offer of marriage, is a virtual twin of Jo's rejection of Laurie's proposal. Armstrong's feeling for locale blesses this movie. The cavernous, bare hallway of Aunt March's house is redolent of both the old lady's wealth and her loneliness. The March attic is both Jo's magical literary workshop where she scribbles while "longing for transformation," and a perfectly miserable little loft. The New York City where Jo tries to make her fortune is quite rightly no metropolis but the overgrown village of 1870 with muddy streets traversed by horse-drawn carriages.

Armstrong also uses weather and the passing seasons to advance the story. Much more than in any previous version, we can sense the March girls growing as the trees foliate, defoliate, and flourish again. The beauty of New England's autumn is here captured in all its bravado, and the juxtaposition of the intense blue of wintry skies (courtesy of Geofrey Simpson's excellent camerawork) with the fireside gold of the interiors exactly evokes what G.K. Chesterton called (in his Dickens book) "the happiness that stands at bay."

But best of all is the director's delicacy at portraying fairly subtle human interactions. (Yes, Alcott can be subtle.) For instance, Armstrong, Ryder, and Bales prepare the way for Jo's rejection of Laurie not by portraying the latter as a milksop but by showing that Jo's affection for him is so sisterly that she can't begin to regard him as a lover.

Cultural strata are also delineated: when Beth lies near death, you hear the Irish Catholic maid murmuring her Hail Marys while the transcendentalist-reared but basically Protestant sisters keep a lovingly silent vigil.

Yet, all said and done, there is a slight discrepancy between adaptor and source. Armstrong is just as firmly a creature of this century as Alcott was of hers, and Armstrong doesn't stretch herself toward the alien sensibility as much as Cukor did in his adaptation. She reins in Alcott's swooning emotionalism, trims her preachiness, underscores and even improves upon the book's infrequent comedy. This *Little Women* is a cooled-off Alcott, less treacly than the novel, less bound by convention and cliché. But it is also less energetic, less psychologically startling (in the scene of Amy's near-drowning, Alcott conveys Jo's darker side better than Armstrong does), less possessed by the lyrical high-mindedness that animates the book. This is a *Little Women* well-staged, carefully researched, and often (as in Beth's death scene) emotionally powerful. But, though it broaches the word "transcendentalism" as earlier versions never did, this adaptation is a little too earthbound, a little too untranscendent.

RICHARD ALLEVA

Reader Alert: *The Boys of Saint Vincent*, reviewed by me in the July 15, 1994 issue, will be shown on the Arts and Entertainment Channel during February, on several days, at different times. I now consider this Canadian movie to be the finest film of 1994. R.A.

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The cognitive dissonance of Murray & Herrnstein

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

If you've just come home from a six-month safari, you may have missed the bitter disputes set off by *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Its authors, sociologist Charles Murray and the late Harvard psychologist Richard J. Herrnstein (hereafter M & H), have been roundly attacked for their ideas. Critique has followed on critique—gaining all the more sales for the book.

According to M & H all the world is divided into five "cognitive classes." Individuals are assigned to one or another of these classes by their IQ scores as measured by standard intelligence tests. At the top is Cognitive Class I, or "the cognitive elite," who in a graphic depiction of the normal bell-shaped curve's distribution of intelligence will occupy the right-hand tail. Class I individuals are defined as the top 5 percent of Americans who have IQs of 125 or more and who number some 12.5 million people. Among these "very bright" individuals are those who regularly find their way into the "cognitively challenging professions." In M & H's depiction of the world, the cognitive elite, especially the top 2 percent, regularly garner rich economic rewards, and enjoy rewarding work running the institutions and businesses of the United States.

The other four classes are also determined by IQ scores: The bright, IQs of 110 to 125; the normal, 90 to 110 who comprise half the population; Class IV, or the dull with IQs of 75 to 90; and Class V or the very dull in the other tail of the distribution with scores of 50 to 75.

Such a class schema is not just an abstract analysis, because for M & H cognitive class determines the fate of individuals and through them American society. But to agree with M & H you have to grant their claims about the nature of human intelligence: Intelligence consists of a general cognitive capacity g, which can be reliably and validly measured by standard IQ tests; IQ in differing populations is to a large degree inherited; IQ is related to academic and other social outcomes. Those in Cognitive Class IV or V, with IQs lower than 90, will display a disproportionate amount of America's social pathology. And yes, the races differ in their average IQ score, with East Asians testing slightly higher than Caucasians, who in turn are on average a lot smarter (15 IQ points) than blacks as a group.

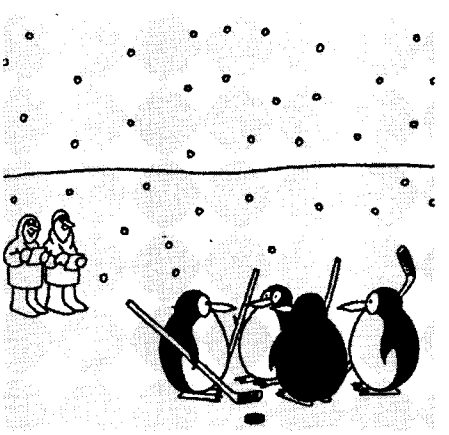
Book discussed in this essay

The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life, *Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein, The Free Press, $30, 845 pp.*

Since for M & H, IQ or cognitive capacity is in great part an inherited fixed endowment, environmental interventions have been, and always will be, ineffectual in achieving an egalitarian society of equal outcome. Yet over the last forty years increasing opportunities have opened up for individuals in the cognitive elite regardless of socioeconomic background. Today, as opposed to the 1950s, very bright children are tested, culled, and selected to attend the country's elite undergraduate and graduate schools. The Harvard class of 1952 was much less academically talented than the present Harvard classes made up of the brightest of the bright from all over the country.

Today's very bright graduates from elite institutions are described by M & H as being cognitively partitioned into high-paying professions on intellectual merit rather than family or social background. The very bright then proceed to find other smart people to marry. The children of this elite, in turn, will be brighter than other children, even granting the effect of regression toward the mean. Slowly but surely America's commitment to rewarding intellectual merit wherever it is found is creating and isolating a separate cognitively elite class.

But a more alarming development, in M & H's judgment, can be seen at the other end of the bell curve. The same forces working to produce the cognitive and economic partitioning of an elite are isolating another group without the requisite brains or education to succeed in contemporary America. This minority of the dull are being economically and socially marginalized by the demands of a high-tech society; and according to M & H, the cognitive disabilities of the dull do not reduce, but instead augment, their disproportionately high rates of reproduction. Ergo, a cognitively incapacitated under-



"This is going to be a tremendous contribution to the data we have on penguin behavior."

SIDNEY CALLAHAN *is a professor of psychology at Mercy College and a regular* Commonweal *columnist.*

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class increases year by year. Here M & H throw in warnings about the dull status of recent immigrants. They see converging social pressures threatening to produce a dysgenic intellectual decline in the population, or the dumbing down of America.

Can anything be done to reverse this cognitive decline? M & H assume that educational interventions cannot do much. They also claim that it isn't possible to stop the filtering processes by which the very smart gain access to elite institutions and economic rewards. The cognitive elite, after all, is more productive economically and can hardly be kept from acquiring more wealth—or more capacity to control the rest of society. In a frightening future scenario floated by M & H (but of course not overtly endorsed), the affluent cognitive elite will not only withdraw into its own isolated enclaves of privilege, but finally, in disillusioned desperation, its members will create a "custodial state" to contain the underclass, "a high-tech and more lavish version of the Indian reservation for some substantial minority of the nation's population."

But there may still be time to avoid such an unhappy outcome for our society. M & H recommend changing social policies so that we realistically take account of the determining role of IQ in social outcomes. Unfortunately, M & H's sketchy proposals for social remedies remain undeveloped and appear in a few flurried pages in their concluding chapter.

They recommend that the United States should simplify bureaucratic rules; return social functions to the neighborhood; punish crime quickly according to clearly understood rules; reward virtue and excellence while eschewing relativism, egalitarianism, and affirmative action; spend more money on gifted children; make laws supporting marriage and stop subsidizing the reproduction of the dull through welfare; reform immigration laws and guarantee that everyone who works full time can escape poverty. While the details remain sketchy, the nostalgic vision presented to justify these proposals is that of the community found in traditional neighborhoods, where even the least bright could find a valued place in society.

So who could disagree with a message that the gravest challenge for any good society is coping with the inequalities found among individuals? Nor would anyone I know deny the existence of excellence or virtue; and surely everyone agrees that each person needs to have human dignity in a community. It's the rest of the M & H program and worldview that creates distrust. Take their ominously utilitarian definition of a valued place: "You occupy a valued place if other people would miss you if you were gone."

Is that it? While M & H drop references to the Founding Fathers and to a philosopher or two, they don't really seem to be cognizant of why and how other moral, philosophical, or religious traditions found and justify the ideal of moral and social equality. Christian affirmations of the intrinsic and equal value of each individual as created and beloved by God find little support in *The Bell Curve*'s totally secular worldview. Here cognitive elites can enjoy wealth and status as their rightful due; they need not recognize any moral obligations to share with their neighbors or worry about a just society. In fact, the whole book seems morally and spiritually tone-deaf.

Still, readers might overlook ethical flaws and half-baked policy recommendations if the treatment of intelligence were sound and convincing. But here M & H's one-dimensional intellectual and scientific analysis is weak and marred by errors and omissions. One grievous mistake, uncovered by a critic who investigated the sources cited, is the noncritical reporting of crudely biased studies purportedly showing an average IQ of 70 among Africans. The studies cited to show East Asian superiority may also be suspect.

Race differences, however, are not the only, or at least not avowedly, the main point of *The Bell Curve*. The central analysis focuses on an all-white sample who were given IQ tests and then followed up over the years with measures in education,

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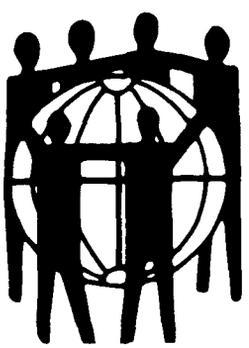

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employment, marital, reproductive, criminal, and health outcomes. High IQ scores were found to be positively related to positive social outcomes, while low IQ scores were related to negative outcomes. But the strength of these statistical relationships and their proper interpretation is problematic; correlations never prove causation since so many other variables may be operating within a complex social situation.

The most crucial problem in M & H's work arises from their fervent belief that standard IQ tests measure what we mean by intelligence, and that IQ measures will be little affected by environmental conditions and interventions. Many other psychologists who study intelligence challenge the false reification of IQ, or g, and claim it to be only a statistical artifact created by tests and testing. Others take the moderate view that yes, IQ tests—when properly administered—may measure *one* facet of cognitive capacity. But there also exist other important dimensions of operating intelligence which are not measured by standard IQ tests.

Fluid intelligence may be different from measures of crystallized intelligence; and social intelligence and other forms of intelligence are definitely not tapped by IQ tests, even if middle-class cultural biases can be eliminated. Reading historical accounts of how IQ tests were developed, one finds out that items which did not fit into one narrow hypothesized definition of intelligence were discarded.

More to the point, most developmental psychologists affirm that even those cognitive capacities tested by IQ tests are dependent on early and continuing environmental factors that stimulate and sharpen mental capacities. The most dangerous bias in all of M & H's work is their willful underestimation of research on environmental and intervention factors. They ignore or dismiss studies which record success in raising IQ. M & H will concede the increase by fifteen points of average IQ scores in other countries over the years, and the increase of anticipated IQ scores in adopted children; but they continue to maintain that most environmental efforts will be fruitless. That's why we should spend more money on the gifted, who can be more economically and socially productive. Such a fixed, fatalistic faith in innate genetic endowments appears unfounded and impervious to counterevidence.

M & H never discuss, for instance, the new findings in brain studies which sup-

Strange 'Bell' fellows

Eugenics is as American as apple pie—well, stale apple pie. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, was notoriously enamored of it. Even Norman Thomas, a putative champion of the common man, bemoaned the tendency of "those of a definitely inferior stock" to go on reproducing themselves. Now come the new kids on the genetic block, *The Bell Curve* authors Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein. Their explanations for the economic and social disparities in American society are hardly new. Thirty years ago Richard Hofstradter examined the long history of such schemes in his classic *Social Darwinism in American Society*, exposing the undemocratic agendas of those who advanced such views. Given this history and their own carefully qualified presentation of the statistical evidence, it is somewhat astonishing that Murray and Herrnstein still advance their findings as a basis for public-policy making. Indeed, what seems unqualified is *The Bell Curve*'s poorly disguised political agenda.

The controversy over *The Bell Curve* is most immediately reminiscent of the furor created by the work of the psychologist Arthur Jensen and the social theorizing of the Nobel Prize-winning physicist William Shockley in the 1960s. Jensen traveled the country arguing that whites scored fifteen points higher than blacks on IQ tests. Shockley proposed that government offer cash incentives to the so-called "welfare queens" to undergo sterilization. Whatever its professed aims, *The Bell Curve* will inevitably enlist, as did Jensen and Shockley, the enthusiastic support of those who are committed to proving the racial superiority of whites over blacks.

That should remind us that not so long ago eugenics was considered a legitimate branch of science, and that prior to World War II eugenic research was popular on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, for example, the Rockefeller Foundation played an important role in establishing eugenics institutions in Weimar Germany and continued to support this type of research even after the Nazi seizure of power. Hitler, in particular, corresponded with American eugenicists and relied on their "expertise" in promoting his racial policies. Eugenics was widely discredited only after its pseudoscientific claims were seen to culminate in the horror of Nazi genocide.

Despite the experience with the Nazi use of eugenics, marginal groups in the United States have continued to preach the gospel of race-science. The eugenics movement here has been kept alive through the efforts of an institution called The Pioneer Fund, established in 1937 by Wickliffe Draper, a New England merchant and two eugenicists, Harry Laughlin and Henry Fairfield Osborn. Draper's fortune was used to bankroll "research" on precisely the kinds of questions *The Bell Curve* examines. The early leadership of the fund praised much of what was done in Nazi Germany in the name of racial "science." For example, both Laughlin and Osborn defended the passage of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 by pointing out that in America, thirty-two states prohibited marriage and sexual intercourse between blacks and whites. It is surprising, given its track record, that the fund continues to operate,

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port the theory of multiple intelligences by finding multiple and separate modular brain structures for different kinds of cognitive functioning. Other studies of the brain point to the malleability and potential for change in brain structures that can be produced by cognitive stimulation, practice, and new social experiences. They ignore emotional and language development, along with developmental studies of intelligence over the life cycle. In the narrow focus of M & H, only one (severely criticized) statistical approach to testing and intelligence is relied upon.

From my own research on the role of emotions on cognitive functioning and memory processes, I see many other problematic issues in M & H's work. Thinking and emotions interact; self-expectations and achievement motivation make a difference when it comes to testing. Negative moods and negative emotions of fear and sadness can depress and slow the cognitive functioning of memory and information processing. On the other hand, positive emotions such as love can effectively attune a person's intelligences and attention to produce effective concrete and creative problem solving. Along with other missing psychological matters of importance, there's no recognition by M & H of the huge research literature on creativity and divergent thinking, which is measured by quite separate methods and seen as distinct from the kind of intelligence that IQ tests can measure.

Well, then, if the arguments of *The Bell Curve* are so deeply flawed, intellectually and ethically obtuse, why are we all spending so much energy criticizing it? Isn't this a case, in Alexander Pope's words, of "breaking a butterfly on a wheel"? No, not really. The fact that the book is now on the best-seller list can be one justification for taking the time to critique its message and methods. There's nothing like an enthusiastically championed half-truth, accompanied by pages of statistics and graphs, to create mystifications that can have dangerous social consequences. Each new negative review will point out problems that nonspecialists might not spot, making it that much harder for the work to be used to justify policy decisions.

At best, *The Bell Curve* can be an object lesson for all of us tempted to live by brains alone. Even the best and the brightest, with the highest IQs in the land, can produce works limited in moral insight and devoid of practical wisdom. Make that dull, very dull. □

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and still adheres to its founding goal of "improv[ing] the character of the American people by encouraging the procreation of descendants of the white persons who settled the original thirteen colonies...."

Following World War II, the Pioneer Fund aligned itself with those opposed to the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation ruling in *Brown* v. *The Board of Education of Topeka*. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it began to actively oppose government programs for the poor such as Head Start. The academic performance of black students, the fund contended, was the result of irreversible genetic deficiencies and government funding for remedial programs was consequently a waste of taxpayers' money. It was during this time that the fund provided Jensen with research grants, which over the years amounted to more than $1 million. Others who were and remain recipients of Pioneer grants include Linda Gottfredson of the University of Delaware, Seymour Itzkoff of Smith College, Garrett Hardin of the University of California at Santa Barbara, Michael Levin of CUNY, and Richard Lynn of the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland.

The Bell Curve is an exhaustively documented book that relies on hundreds of perfectly reputable sources. It is also true, however, that Herrnstein and Murray use the work of many social scientists connected with the Pioneer Fund. According to Charles Lane ("The Tainted Sources of 'The Bell Curve,'" the *New York Review of Books*, December 1, 1994), no fewer than seventeen researchers cited in *The Bell Curve*'s bibliography have contributed to *Mankind Quarterly*, a journal founded and funded by people, Lane writes, "who believe in the genetic superiority of the white race." Since 1978 the journal has been edited by Roger Pearson, a British anthropologist who has expressed both anti-Semitic and white supremacist views. Furthermore, Pearson's Institute for the Study of Man, which publishes *Mankind Quarterly*, is another Pioneer Fund project and fund award recipients Itzkoff and Lynn both sit on the journal's editorial board. Research articles by Richard Lynn in *Mankind Quarterly* are liberally cited in *The Bell Curve*.

Neither Herrnstein nor Murray received money from the Pioneer Fund, but their use of sources from academic racialists throws a disturbing light on *The Bell Curve*. Inadvertently, perhaps, the authors have contributed to the rehabilitation of eugenic ideas once widely discredited. If the eugenicists of the 1920s and '30s favored government policies to prevent undesirable groups from overwhelming the "native stock," the contemporary heirs to such views seem eager to attack affirmative action, welfare, and programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, arguing once again that money spent on the "inferior" is money wasted.

Will the arguments put forth in *The Bell Curve* enter the public policy debate in Washington today? House Speaker Newt Gingrich's recent praise for the civil rights revolution of the 1960s would seem to suggest that even a conservative "revolutionary" like Gingrich is not about to revisit a politics that explicitly embraces the idea of racial inferiority. Still, like the "scientific" studies on racial differences that have preceded it, *The Bell Curve* will undoubtedly give encouragement to both the crudest and the most subtle forms of racism.

JACK FISCHEL

Jack Fischel teachers history at Millersville University in Millersville, Pennsylvania.

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Democracy's weak pulse

DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL
Jean Bethke Elshtain
Basic Books, $20, 176 pp.

David McCabe

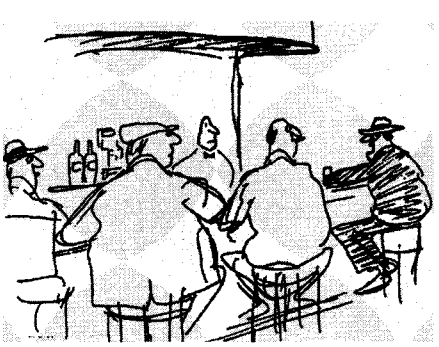
"The aim of this book is to reach disagreement." With this bold gambit Jean Bethke Elshtain opens *Democracy on Trial*, a collection of five lectures in which she assesses the prospects for democracy, here and around the world. Some readers may feel tempted to put down the book right there, convinced that whatever ills plague our current political scene, an overeagerness for agreement is not one of them. Indeed, several races in the recent midterm elections displayed levels of rancor sufficient to suggest that if one candidate declared his intention to bury the hatchet, it might be a good idea for his opponent to steer clear of the scene. Given all this, it's no small feat that Elshtain, who teaches political theory at the University of Chicago and has been a longtime contributor to *Commonweal*, is able to mount a convincing case for the value of disagreement within a democracy.

Elshtain's plea arises not out of fear of our mindless conformity, but from her worry that the conditions necessary for the sort of public dialogue that generates authentic political disagreement are fast disappearing. To disagree over politics in the manner appropriate to a democracy, conversants must share some understanding of how to carry out civic debate and must meet in a public forum where each recognizes the other in their shared identity as citizens. This small book shows dramatically how both of these elements are at risk in America today, and why the threat to our democracy is enormous.

What went wrong? The chief culprit, says Elshtain, has been the dissolution of what political theorists call "civil society." Civil society consists of those freely formed associations and institutions that, in Elshtain's nice metaphor, honeycomb democratic society, bridging the gap between atomized individuals and the faceless collective of the state. In Elshtain's view, the loss of civil society means that citizens fail to cultivate what Tocqueville called the "habits of the heart" essential to a democratic citizenry and remain mired in a narrow concern with their own self-interest, cut off from meaningful community with their fellows.

The decline of civil society also signals the weakening of social networks that traditionally provided care for the less fortunate. This role then gets handed over to the state, yielding a dynamic with inevitably disastrous results: for at the same time that citizens feel more disconnected from one another, the state is increasingly expected to fill the vacuum left by a moribund civil society. Individuals thus come to see themselves as clients of the state, clamoring that their needs be ministered to by this awesome leviathan, but caring little that it do likewise for their fellow citizens.

It's not hard to see how such a mindset poses real problems for a democracy, and



"I say to hell with everybody! Present company excepted, of course."

Elshtain delineates these with great clarity. Especially valuable is her discussion of the debilitating effects resulting from what she calls the politics of displacement and the politics of difference. The politics of displacement (which Elshtain attributes to a hyperbolic fascination with the slogan "the personal is political") dangerously blurs the line between public and private and encourages citizens publicly to put forth claims grounded in facets of their personal identities that are neither required nor helpful for civic debate. Thus Elshtain criticizes the gay community's insistence that their homosexuality be validated, rather than merely tolerated, and points out that demanding such validation weakens the boundary between public and private, thereby threatening the very right to privacy central to sexual freedom. Her argument here is insightful, though I wish she had taken it further and tackled the more difficult questions, such as whether same-sex partners deserve the same public privileges (for example, marriage and adoption rights) as heterosexuals. These are, of course, the really interesting cases, because in them public and private seem inextricably linked, and it's not clear how Elshtain's argument applies to them.

The politics of difference presents a development even more threatening to democracy, says Elshtain, and she is greatly troubled by the notion that people who differ in various ways (for example, race, gender, sexual orientation) cannot for this reason reach a genuine meeting of the minds—the notion, for example, that if one is black one thinks black, or that if one is a man one thinks male. The conviction that certain people "just don't get it," and can't get it, denies at its root the kind of debate between citizens that is vital to a healthy democracy, says Elshtain; and her argument here points to a rupture potentially devastating for societies like ours. But after

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making this eminently sound point, Elshtain goes on to criticize multiculturalism in education on the grounds that it is "designed explicitly to entrench differences." This seems disingenuous, for while such an unworthy aim might be the goal of the most extreme fringe of that movement, its more sensible advocates stress how multiculturalism can help bridge the gaps between the increasingly diverse peoples that make up America today and thereby help all citizens better to understand the experiences of their comrades. Viewed this way, multiculturalism very likely has an important role to play in sustaining our democracy, in a manner quite in keeping with the spirit of Elshtain's overall argument.

Having chronicled democracy's problems, Elshtain stresses the need to restore the bonds of citizenship, civility, and public-spiritedness. Since only a reinvigorated civil society can do that, the burden lies on the citizens themselves, and not the state. This seems right, for democracy is, ultimately, rule by the people. Still, when Elshtain downplays the importance of various provisions of the welfare state and quotes one sociologist on the need for "friendship networks,...voluntarism, and spontaneous groups and movements," readers may hear the echo of "a thousand points of light" and may feel similar pangs of unease. Elshtain is surely right to point out the potential for co-dependency that arises from the state's trying to manage people's lives for them, and in a wonderful image she suggests that chronically looking to the state to solve our ills threatens to "further thin out the skein of obligation" between citizens. But while this may be one result of the statism she criticizes, her charge that statists "want to thin out the ties of civil society" seems unwarranted. Another, less cynical explanation is to see welfare statism as a response to the facts that voluntary networks of care appear inadequate to deal with the massive number of people who fall through the cracks in our economy, and that the state now appears the only organization that can be counted on to provide the safety net which civil society has abjured. So while I suspect Elshtain is right in saying that statism has accelerated the decline of civil society, the crucial question remains, why did civil society decline in the first place?

There is, of course, one simple though discomfiting answer: that democracy, and the institutions of civil society central to it, assume too roseate a view of humanity and radically overestimate the extent to which human beings are willing to ignore self-interest and attend to the needs of their fel-

REVIEWER

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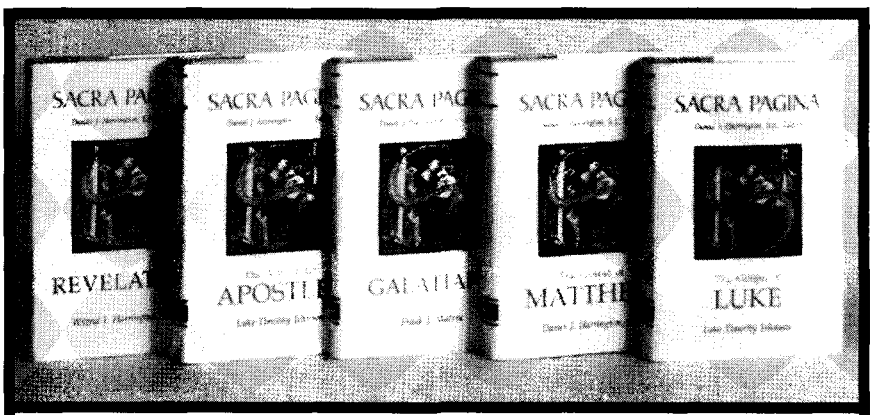
PATRICIA A. O'CONNELL, *who is a native of Maine, spent seven years as a medical book editor and field representative traveling to health-care facilities across the United States.*



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lows. Elshtain gamely rejects this critique and denies early on that democracy must be grounded in "sunny dispositions about the innate goodness of human beings." I wonder, though, if her argument does not commit her to a deep optimism about human nature which, despite its emotional pull, may strike some readers as slightly Panglossian. Her confidence in democracy rests, she says, "on the presumption that one's fellow citizens are people of good will who yearn for the opportunity to work together," and she cites various events (the civil rights movement, democracy's advances in Latin America) to exemplify the good will she mentions. A quick glance at our own domestic situation, though, reveals a citizenry almost wholly concerned with protecting its tax dollars and rationalizing this self-interest via a simplistic bootstrap explanation of individual achievement that owes much to Herbert Spencer, all of which suggests that the reservoirs of good will Elshtain appeals to may be lower than she thinks, and her examples of democracy's shining moments more the exception than the rule.

Elshtain would no doubt respond to such worries by stressing the enduring importance in our lives of the twin pillars of hope and faith, virtues Hannah Arendt championed and which Elshtain cites often in her writings. Elshtain herself clearly does not lack for these, and along with the intelligence and courage displayed here, they make her a formidable ally against democracy's naysayers. Her message could not be more urgent. Rarely has the need for confidence in democracy and our fellow citizens been so imperative, and rarely has the evidence for such confidence been so weak. This, I suspect, is the deepest political danger of our age, one that almost justifies us in speaking of the tragedy of democracy. Perhaps Elshtain is right; hope and faith may be all we have left. □

HEALTH CARE: SMALL-SCALE & BIG

HOSPITAL
An Oral History of Cook County Hospital
Sydney Lewis
The New Press, $25, 349 pp.

TAKING CARE OF OUR OWN
A Year in the Life of a Small Hospital
Susan Garrett
Dutton, $19.95, 177 pp.

Patricia O'Connell

We all know what happened to the 1994 Clinton plan to reform U.S. health care, much discussed in the pages of *Commonweal*. In two new books—both excellent—a big-city medical center in the Midwest and a small-town hospital in New England illustrate the *current* state of U.S. health care.

Cook County, which serves as the model for the TV series "ER," is Chicago's only public hospital, and is spread out over thirteen buildings. In *Hospital*, Sydney Lewis, the daughter and granddaughter of nurses and former assistant to oral historian Studs Terkel, has assembled sixty-plus candid and poignant interviews with a diverse group from County: physicians, patients, nurses, maintenance staff, administrators, social workers, etc. (one person per chapter).

"And would it be cheaper if I had appendicitis in an off-peak period?"

It's difficult to single out any one of them because they all are articulate in different ways and with different foci, but here's a sample: Surgeon John Barrett, a native of Cork, Ireland, who thought he would be a family practitioner in his own country, is now director of the trauma unit and president of the medical staff. Two of his thought-provoking observations are: "The short-term problem is that people have access to guns; the *real* problem is that they don't have coping mechanisms"; and "the ancient Chinese had it much better—they said, 'When you're well, you pay the doctor; when you're sick, the doctor pays you.'" His American-born wife, Kathy, is a nurse who has served in the medical admitting unit, the coronary care unit, the prison unit, the procedure room (a.k.a. the shock room), medical intensive care, and the department of quality assurance. She characterizes the physicians of the 1980s as "me me, I I, car phone, Brie cheese." And Jewell Jenkins, a college-educated housekeeper on the AIDS ward, begins the workday raising window shades with the words, "Let's see what God is doing out here today."

As one might imagine, the turf wars, red tape, and miscommunications in an institution of County's size are legion. These interviews reveal how extramedical issues affect patient care. A political patronage system in which people paid to get their jobs existed for far too long. We hear from workers who think certain directors are divine and others who consider those same directors incompetent or worse. In the 1970s, the physicians and nurses went on strike; squabbles over seniority versus ability and the fear of being "written up" drain the time, energy, and morale of employees. Lewis also points out the racial distinctions in occupational categories at County: most attending physicians are white, many M.D.s in training are foreign-born, nurses now tend to be Asian, and the staff members who keep the building up and running are black.

There are opportunists dealing drugs in the hospital, patients who will be released only to have their wheelchairs stolen where they live (or who will sell them on the street), and three-year-olds diagnosed with syphilis. Ethical dilemmas like treat-

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ing arsonists burned in fires they've set and the cost of intensive care of high-risk neonates and the elderly (compared with the cost of immunizations) are also discussed. What saves the reader from being overwhelmed is the fact that Lewis has included interviews with people who seem to have a true spiritual calling to health care: a physician who was in the Jesuit novitiate and recognized that jobs as an orderly and ambulance driver were leading him into medicine; another doctor (a former seminarian) who first worked in County as a community service project required by his Catholic junior and senior high schools in Chicago. And then there's blessed Jewell Jenkins, the aforementioned windowshades-raising housekeeper, who defies categorization.

Susan Garrett, the former administrator of York (Maine) Hospital, has written *Taking Care of Our Own* based upon many years of experience in large and small hospitals. The "characters" in this memoir are composites, but the reader will have no trouble recognizing the truth in this narrative of how a small hospital struggles to stay afloat, compete with other medical institutions, and provide quality care to its community.

This author begins her book with a bit of poetry ("Postcards") from her husband, the wonderful writer George Garrett—"I know what happens in my neighborhood/By sounds, by heart." Many of the problems at a small hospital are the same as at a large one: government regulation; "patients" suspected of coming to the facility for companionship, a meal, and a roof over their heads rather than for treatment of actual medical problems; rising costs; lavish expectations by laypeople of what medicine can accomplish; physical plant and equipment obsolescence and breakdown. However, because of the scope of Garrett's position, she has a more comprehensive view of her institution than most of the folks interviewed in *Hospital* have of Cook County.

And some of the situations here seem unique to Maine: Dr. Art Seiler falls out of his boat and is rescued by lobsterman Big Scotty Milliken, only to have Big Scotty fall off the town dock an hour later, get carried upriver, and be cared for at the hospital by Dr. Seiler. Garrett constantly has to make plans for the hospital with a bifurcated view of her "clientele"—the small, year-round population, then the invasion of summer tourists. Further, the decision making that goes into building a new wing of the hospital must take into account the inherent frugality and modesty of the local trustees, who for the most part live in small houses despite their incomes and who tend to regard even required change as extravagance and enslavement to novelty. (Various unfamiliar parties who show up at a meeting regarding the bonds that will be used to fund the new-wing construction are referred to as "suits from New York.")

> *This is a Protestant town that happens to have a Catholic church, but in the hospital it is Father O'Malley who at any time of day walks through the halls, breaking up despair like a ship cutting through Arctic ice, who turns the corner of a corridor as naturally as a handrail and enters with ease a conversation or vigil. With the Protestant ministers—fine men well organized among themselves to cover the hospital—the schedule is the guide: "I'll be there at four forty-five" or "The Reverend Welch is taking calls today." Whenever I see Father O'Malley, he is on his way somewhere, but I never see him going out nor do I see him coming in. He appears suddenly as if out of the air.*
>
> —Susan Garrett
>
> *Taking Care of Our Own*

Garrett does a phenomenal job of interweaving into her short memoir some of the specific legislation and clinical advances that have made medicine almost ridiculously complex, even at a small hospital. She also shows that hospital administrators are not just number-crunchers, as when she completely loses patience with a pharmaceutical rep complaining about the cost of research and development, saying, "*Your firm makes a gross profit over the diseased bodies of my neighbors.*"

These two books reveal what is right and what is wrong with the current health-care system; pick up either one (or both) and ponder what kind of health-care reform would realistically address our needs and be affordable. Those who think such decisions are better made by Washington officials might consider this passage from *Taking Care of Our Own*: "A grade school question: Isn't the government us?" □

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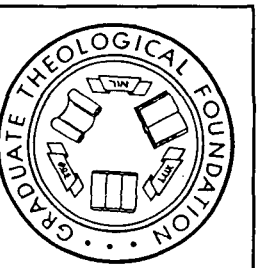

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 2)

apostolic succession, but only those church authorities who might condemn unbelievers as stupid or rebellious.

I too am an ordinary Catholic believer who affirms that Christians have been commissioned by God to pass on divinely revealed truths. And assuredly the apostolic succession of bishops and popes is important in this process, but so are all the other dedicated Christians who have been members of the body throughout the ages.

More to the point, why should our living apostolic faith in the infinite living God who "makes all things new," not evolve as a dynamic, ever enlarging understanding of and appreciative commitment to God's truth? As theologian Nicholas Lash has said, Christians must be engaged "in the endlessness of making sense" of the gospel, and not turn away from "the labor of interpretation."

Persevering labor is always required. The historical record is there for all to see: Popes and church authorities and lay persons and saints and theologians, acting with good will, have made mistakes because of their limited perspective. Think of the Crusades, slavery, the Inquisition, the divine right of kings, Galileo, resisting the railroads or smallpox vaccinations, and so on. Thank God the church has been given the self-correcting guidance of the Holy Spirit leading us to be an "ever reforming" institution, capable of change and constant renewal.

At this very moment, the present pope, in an inspired move, plans a great penance service at the year 2000 in reparation for the church's failings in the past. Alas, he probably isn't going to include abuses of papal authority in his confessional list. (But then again, since God is a God of surprises, maybe he will.) After all, why be spared from Protestant fundamentalist beliefs in biblical inerrancy only to fall into an equally literalist papal fundamentalism?

Finally, Saint Thomas's God, and David M. Tye's God, and my God is the ineffable Holy Trinity, infinite in power, majesty, and transcendent mystery. Yet this very God, according to the Gospels, so loves the world that the Word becomes flesh, and enters into all the dynamics of history, context, and systemic forces—even to becoming the saving victim of the cross. So why should we not humbly acknowledge and accept the creation's living webs of time and context? God can use the dynamic processes of the universe and our human nature to communicate with us at the present moment. Christians are on an ardent pilgrimage and collectively engaging in an eternal conversation, not taking dictation and faxing the texts from one generation to the next.

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

Roaches & God

West Glacier, Mont.

To the Editors: I guess we can excuse the puzzlement over panentheism expressed by Sidney Callahan in her column titled "Cockroaches Aren't God" [January 13.] Even *The Harper Dictionary of Modern Thought* seems equally at sea. But Dagobert Runes's *Dictionary of Philosophy* is more specific. It defines panentheism as "the view that God interpenetrates everything without canceling the relative independent existence of the world of entities." So it takes a "mediating position" between the "extreme immanence" of pantheism and "extreme transcendence." In panentheism God is independent of the created but the created remain dependent on the Creator. I'm sure there are variations on this theme, but in any case no one is going to say we must worship cockroaches.

JACK HOLTERMAN

More on Sant'Egidio

Bowie, Md.

To the Editors: I was first drawn to Robert Imbelli's article on the Community of Sant'Egidio [November 18] because of the name—it was my uncle's. But then I found the content of the article fascinating because of the community's focus on a spirituality based in the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. For years I have been searching for a way to ground the activities of our parish ministries in a way faithful to the concepts of Vatican II. It appears from Father Imbelli's article that I may have found the answer.

I would appreciate any further information you may have—or the name of a person who may be contacted to obtain such information—that may be helpful in initiating a similar community effort in my parish, located in the Archdiocese of Washington.

BARTHOLOMEW J. MERELLA

From the editors: Inquiries may be directed to Andrea Bartoli, Community of Sant'Egidio, P.O. Box 250-299, New York, N.Y. 10025-1534.

Alleva on 'Vampire'

Alliance, Ohio

To the Editors: While it's true that a work of art should stand on its own merits, it's also true that when the same artistic statement is made in different media, the resulting works remain inextricably intertwined, like twins conjoined at the heart.

Richard Alleva clearly enjoyed reviewing *Interview with the Vampire*, pulling out all the stops in his erudite bag o' tricks

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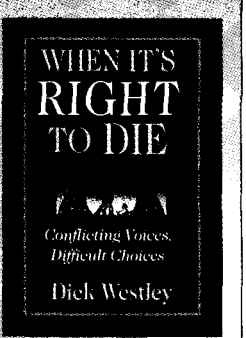

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[December 2, 1994]. The focus of his review is his perception of homosexuality in the film. He really needn't fret; I don't believe there are any sexual "norms" for the dead. They find sex obsolete. The relationships in this story represent spirits in isolated loneliness and their attempts to connect beyond the body. (This is also done sometimes by the living.)

Anne Rice's novel records the psychological journey of a mother subconsciously trying to accept her small daughter's death from the "living vampire," leukemia. "Brotherhood begins in shared pain"; the personal involvement of the reader with this author results from her power to bring about that sharing. The question, "Why, if God loves us, does he take our children from us?" becomes "Why is the Garden of Love also the Savage Garden?" These are the questions religion attempts to answer, or, more honestly, gives us the courage to explore. The "purple prose" Alleva dreads is, perhaps, their best configuration. Unstylish, yes, unsophisticated, it is the language of the heart. I suppose I'm piqued by the reviewer's pride in the fact that he hadn't read the novel. I would try to enlighten him, but he already said he wouldn't listen.

DEBORAH MATTINGLY CONNER

Reversible rule

Aurora, Ohio

To the Editors: Your December 2, 1994 "Et cetera" commenting on Gabe Huck's much appreciated report on the lectionary reversals ["Rome Speaks: Inclusive Language Verboten," November 18, 1994] brought to mind Geoffrey Wainwright's work on usage of the "tag," *lex orandi, lex credendi* in his 1980 book *Doxology.* It may shed some light on the reverse "tag," cited by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *lex credendi, lex orandi.*

Wainwright points out that Pius XII quoted the original axiom, coined by Prosper of Aquitaine in the fifth century, in the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947). Paragraph 48 of the encyclical reads: "During the discussion of a doubtful or controversial truth, the church and the Holy Fathers have not failed to look at the age-old and age-honored sacred rites for enlightenment. Hence the well-known and venerable maxim: '*Legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*'—let the rule for prayer determine the rule of belief."

The encyclical then further states, in the same paragraph: "But if one desires to differentiate and describe the relationship between faith and the sacred liturgy in absolute and general terms, it is perfectly correct to say: '*Lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi*'—Let the rule of belief determine the rule of prayer."

Wainwright comments that one of the questions the encyclical raises is the relationship between the authority of the worship of the church as such and the authority of the teaching office in the church. That question seems to be at the basis of the lectionary reversal. MARIE BURKE PICARD

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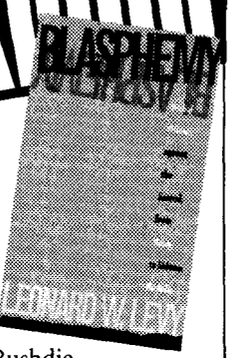

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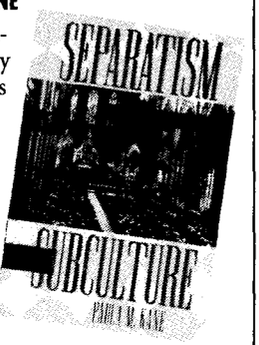

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The 70th Anniversary Year

For *Commonweal*, 1994 was a banner year. We celebrated our 70th anniversary and a renewed sense of the magazine's unique role and contribution. Circulation at last is slowly rising. Three Commonweal forums on Religion and the Media—in Chicago, Washington, and New York—brought awareness of the magazine to the wider American public. A new endowment program was planned. And the continued, at times increased, support of the Associates enabled us to meet our rising expenses once again. The distinguished membership list below, recording the Associates' gifts received from January 17, 1994 through January 19, 1995, includes a number of new memberships. To one and all, the staff's heartfelt thanks.

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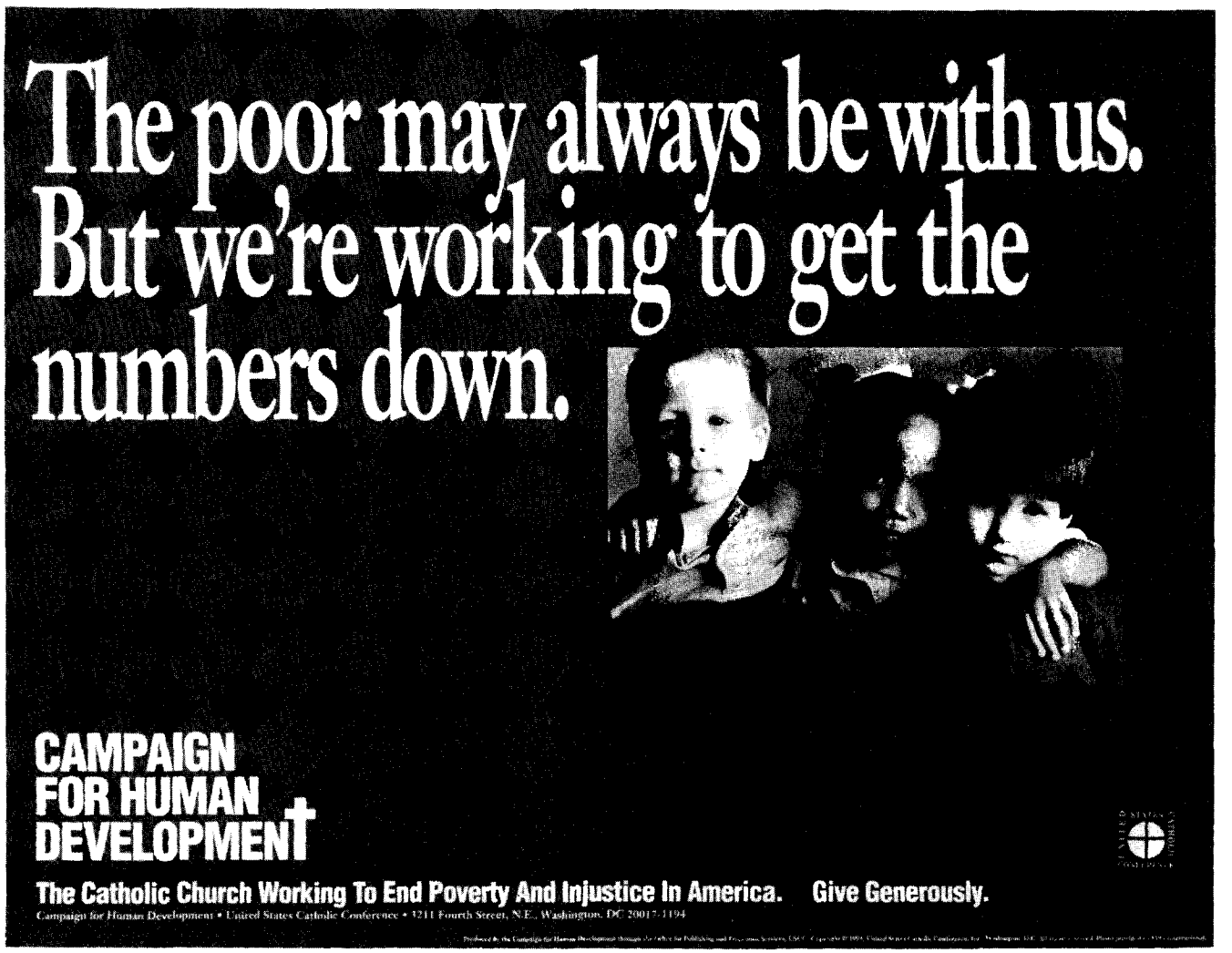
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April 1, 2004

BUD JOHNSON

The monthly mail delivery came today and with it an ad for President Smith's latest book. The annual Presidential Book has replaced the State of the Union address since the ratification of the Twenty-eighth Amendment barring politicians from holding political office. The edition for 2004 has lots of pictures of President Smith back home in Nebraska on his rutabaga farm.

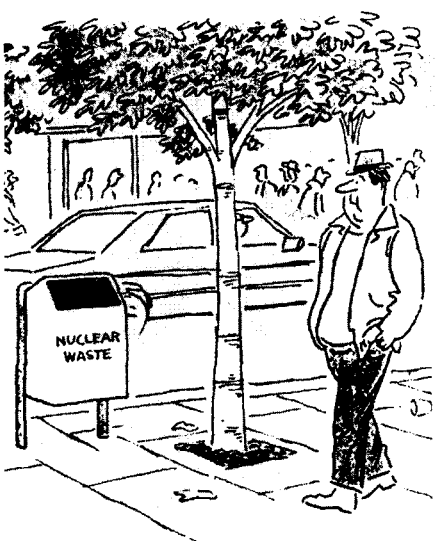
Everyone who goes to Washington is now named Smith. Congress meets once every two years and then for only six weeks. Members are so busy at home raising crops, selling used cars, and performing heart transplants they have little time for trivial pursuits, like running a government. There isn't much to do anyway with services cut back to the 1922 level to comply with the balanced budget amendment without raising taxes.

There's really no need to talk about the state of the *Union* anymore. With the adoption of the "Back to Normalcy" Amendment, the Preamble of the Constitution now begins: "We the *Normal* People of the *Sovereign* States...." In deference to campaign promises to end "welfare as we know it," the Preamble's reference to promoting "the general welfare" was dropped.

The ad for President Smith's book came in an envelope posted with the new Joe Camel stamp, the latest commercial issue since the postal service started selling postal sponsorships to help the government replace the now unconstitutional income tax. The Golden Arches issue was a collector's item, with hundreds lining up at McDonald's for the first-day cover. The Preparation H commemorative was another sellout. In keeping with the season, the most recent Christmas stamp advertised a Treasury collection of Madonna's greatest hits.

No one is surprised that Joe Camel appears on the stamps. When the surgeon general's office was unfunded, surgeon generals' warnings vanished with it. Instead, there is a secretary of agriculture's warning: "Nonsmoking is injurious to the health of tobacco farmers."

Cigarettes, of course, have again become fashionable thanks to the ratification of the "Smoker's Rights Amendment" allowing anyone to smoke any time at any place one chooses. Those who selfishly insists on a whiff of smoke-free air are required to stand out in the cold to indulge



their habit.

Also in the mail is notice of the next meeting of our neighborhood military unit. The Thirty-fourth Amendment makes it clear that all citizens are members of a "well-regulated militia." Not only is everyone allowed to own a gun but we all are entitled to any kind of munitions on the market. There has been a marked decline in burglaries since homeowners began installing land mines in their front yards.

Our regular military forces, forbidden to go abroad by the Thirty-fifth ("No Entangling Alliances") Amendment, are now lined up shoulder to shoulder on the southern borders to prevent the infiltration of aliens. The amendment also halted the pouring of American dollars down foreign rat holes, resulting in the nation's most extensive rodent control program in history when the money was diverted to American rat holes.

The mail also brings an invitation for the whole family to attend a neighborhood picnic and public hanging in the nearby park next Sunday after church. Additional entertainment will be provided by a blackface minstrel show underwritten by the revamped National Endowment for the Arts as part of its Renewing American Civilization Program.

Another announcement calls attention to an open house and porridge supper at our neighborhood orphanage. As expected, orphanages, coupled with the end of welfare payments, have put former recipients into the work force. It's an inspiration to see them racing along the streets competing for fares with their rickshaws, increasingly popular following the elimination of public transit.

And, of yes, everyone is welcome at our neighborhood school for an evening of dramatic recitations from the *McGuffey's Readers*. The evening of entertainment is the students' way of saying thanks for the Thirty-sixth Amendment. It outlawed multiculturalism and allowed schools to learn more about George Washington and the cherry tree as well as other great events in our history.

Every day, in accordance with the Thirty-seventh Amendment, students now stand up and praise the Lord for getting government off our backs. It's a bright new day in America. □

Bud Johnson was for many years a special assistant to the mayor of Milwaukee.

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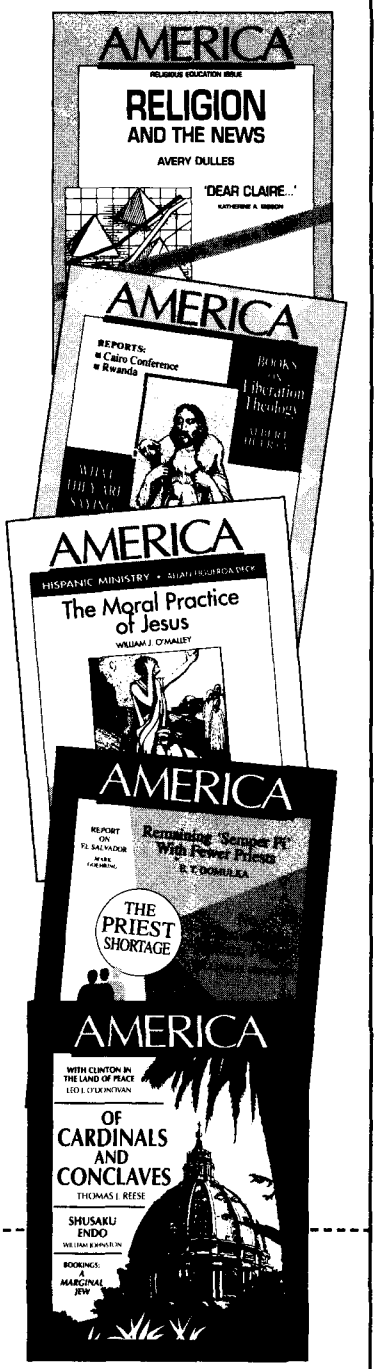

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